

Rep. Zoe Lofgren Responds to Vietnamese Propaganda

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July 22, 2010

Washington, D.C. – Today, Representative Zoe Lofgren (D-San Jose) sent the following letter to The Hill newspaper responding to their letter defending their decision to accept paid advertisements from the communist government of Vietnam.

Ms. Francine M. McMahon, Publisher

The Hill

1625 K Street NW

Suite 900

Washington, DC 20006

Dear Ms. McMahon,

Thank you for responding to the letter I sent on June 24th, in which I raised my concerns about The Hill's publication of advertisements placed by the Government of Vietnam.

I received your response on a day which coincided with The Hill's publication of yet another of these

advertisements. You are correct. You are not required in any way to answer my inquiry regarding the payments you received from the communist government in Vietnam to run their propaganda ads.

While I certainly respect The Hill's First Amendment rights, the possession of the right does not require a newspaper to publish every item submitted to it. As the Supreme Court held in *Miami Herald Publishing v. Tornillo*, "A newspaper is more than a passive receptacle for news, comment, and advertising. The choice of material to go into a newspaper... constitute[s] the exercise of editorial content and judgment." In fact, just last week, NBC and CBS refused to run a television advertisement from the National Republican Trust PAC that promotes opposition to the construction of a mosque near Ground Zero in New York City.

I am saddened that The Hill has continued to run these advertisements paid for by the government of Vietnam. This oppressive and brutal regime regularly engages in censorship, and arrests and jails democracy activists with its draconian "anti-propaganda" law. You have the protection of our Constitution's First Amendment. That doesn't require you to accept payment from an oppressive regime who is spreading their own propaganda.

The advertisement, which suggests an improving U.S.-Vietnamese relationship, and dismisses human rights violations as the product of mere cultural differences, fails to point out the backslide in conditions that occurred once Vietnam achieved its trade goals. In the 15 years since diplomatic relations were normalized, little progress has been made. As the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) assesses in its 2010 Annual Report, released in May 2010: "Vietnam's overall human rights record remains poor, and has deteriorated since Vietnam joined the WTO in January 2007. Vietnam is an authoritarian state governed by the Communist Party. Over the past two years, the government has moved decisively to repress any perceived challenges to its authority, tightening controls on the freedom of expression, association, and assembly."

The government of Vietnam holds itself out to be a positive example to other countries, and is now using our media to spread propaganda, whitewashing serious human rights concerns and implying that our two countries should merely "keep working in the areas of agreement." While I understand the benefit of diplomacy and constructive dialogue, it has been my experience that the government of Vietnam lacks a meaningful commitment to reform. I firmly believe that we need to send a message to the Vietnamese government that we do not condone its repression of basic human rights. The regime's use of anti-propaganda laws to silence dissent and maintain one-party control is not democracy, should not be tolerated, and should not be ignored for economic gain or any other reasons.

I am disappointed that The Hill continues to provide a voice to a government that silences so many of its own citizens, including reporters who do not enjoy the freedom of the press in Vietnam that you enjoy in the United States.

Sincerely,

ZOE LOFGREN

Member of Congress

[Click here for Rep. Lofgren's letter to the editor questioning the Hill's decision to accept ad revenue from the Vietnamese government.](#)

[Click here for the letter Rep. Lofgren sent to The Hill newspaper request details on the Vietnamese government ads.](#)

[Click here for The Hill's newspaper's reply to Rep. Lofgren's requesting additional details on the Vietnamese government ads.](#)

Congresswoman Zoe Lofgren is serving her eighth term in Congress representing most of the City of San Jose and Santa Clara County. She is the Chair of the House Committee on Standards of Official Conduct. She also serves as Chair of the House Judiciary Subcommittee on Immigration, Citizenship, Refugees, Border Security, and International Law. She Chairs the House Administration Subcommittee on Elections and serves on the House Homeland Security Committee. Congresswoman Lofgren is Chair of the California Democratic Congressional Delegation consisting of 34 Democratic members of the U.S. House of Representatives from California.